

TRAVELS IN THE CONGO

Andre Gide Goes as a Representative of
the French Government

Travels in the Congo. By Andre Gide. Translated from the French by Dorothy Bussy. \$3.00. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

ANDRE GIDE first experienced a desire to journey to the Congo at the age of twenty. It was not until thirty-six years later that the opportunity presented itself, enabling him to make the trip as an emissary of the French Government to inquire into the living conditions of the natives and to examine the efficiency of the colonial administration. That he had official duties to perform seems to have been a source of mild annoyance to him, and with characteristic frankness he does not hesitate to admit it. "I cannot get it into my head that I am charged with a mission and therefore an official personage. I have the greatest difficulty in puffing myself out to fill this role."

With an artistic dexterity M. Gide intertwines the threads of pure description, of sparkling personal irrelevances, of occasional whimsicalities about the sadness and the horror which are, indeed, the burden of his record. The cruelties that are committed in the name of religion and the innate stupidity of the native are observed on every hand. But M. Gide is not one to mince the truth. The white man, he observes, must bear a large share of the responsibility for existing conditions. For the torment which the superior European has inflicted in the line of duty, or out of it, has very often surpassed, in degree of cruelty, the fanatic gestures of the blacks among themselves. That situation, however, is becoming a thing of the past, for there is an increasing display of intelligence and sympathy marking the contact of white and black. Upon those two qualities alone depends the success of any foreign administrative mission.

One need not search far for suggestions of the sensuous charm of the Congo. The gems of luxurious beauty which the printed page bears are hardly less real than the scenes and sights which inspired them, for the glory of tropical Africa is in them. Here, for example, is Andre Gide writing of the sunrise: "As the sun rose, the greenness became paler and paler so that it turned at last into a milky, azure mist; and the softness of this profusion of silver is beyond words. The immensity of the light shed from the veiled sky is like the pianissimo of a full orchestra." And yet another sunrise: "The sun was rising as we entered the pool of Boloba. Not a wrinkle was to be seen on the immense sheet of widening water, not even the slightest shimmer to blur its surface. It lay, an intact and perfect shell, holding the pure and smiling reflection of the purest sky. In the east, the sun was crimsoning a few long, trailing clouds. Towards the west, sky and lake were the same pearl color, a delicate and tender grey; in this exquisite mother of pearl every blended

color lay dormant, yet already quivering with the promise of the day's glories. In the distance a few low-lying islands floated ethereally in a liquid haze. . . . The air blows so light, so suave, so voluptuously soft, that one seems to be breathing deliciousness."

Those who read and enjoyed "The Counterfeiters," the author's novel of a year or two ago, will find "Travels in the Congo" an equally enjoyable book. For, though the subject is vastly different, the manner is the same. Those who have not yet made the acquaintance of M. Gide can do so most profitably in this book, and assure themselves an experience of complete satisfaction. M. G.